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~~MICHAEL~~ ~~RODAN~~, JR., CLERK

IN THE
Supreme Court of the United States

OCTOBER TERM, 1978

No.**78-504**

SAL MARRA,

Petitioner

v.

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA,

Respondent

PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI

**To The Supreme Court of
Appeals of West Virginia**

LEO CATSONIS
CATSONIS AND LINKOUS
205 Security Building
Charleston, WV 25301

LEONARD Z. ALPERT
3167 Main Street
Weirton, WV 26062

COUNSEL FOR PETITIONER



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No.

SAL MARRA,

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**PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI
To The Supreme Court of
Appeals of West Virginia**

Petitioner, Sal Marra, respectfully prays that a writ of certiorari issue to review the judgment of the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia entered in this case on June 27, 1978.

OPINION BELOW

There was no opinion rendered by the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia in that the Court denied the petition for writ of error and supersedeas by Order entered on June 27, 1978, a copy of which is appended at App. A, p. 1.

JURISDICTION

The judgment Order of the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia was entered on June 27, 1978,

and this petition was filed within 90 days of that date. The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked pursuant to 28 U.S.C. 1257 (3).

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether a defendant in a state court criminal trial is denied rights afforded by the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendment when the trial jurors are aware that the defendant had been found guilty in a prior trial.

2. Whether the decision below denied petitioner an appeal as a matter of right and thus denied equal protection via the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY PROVISIONS INVOLVED

Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments; W. Va. Code, Ch. 58, Art. 5, Sections 1, 3, 4 and 10.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Petitioner was indicted at the September, 1976, term of the Circuit Court of Hancock County, West Virginia for sale and delivery of two pounds of marijuana, a Schedule I controlled substance. Petitioner was tried on the indictment in June, 1977, and found guilty. Petitioner's motion for a new trial was granted in August, 1977, and thereafter filed, *inter alia*, a motion for a change of venue alleging that he could not receive a fair and impartial trial in Hancock County, West Virginia, and an evidentiary hearing was conducted in August and September, 1977.

The motion for change of venue was predicated upon the fact that during the early 1970's petitioner, to-

gether with five other police officers of the City of Weirton, West Virginia, police department had been involved in a series of breaking and enterings during the night-time of various retail storerooms throughout the City of Weirton, in Hancock and Brooke Counties, West Virginia. These "Police Scandal" cases literally shocked the community and caused the people of the City of Weirton to lose confidence in its police department. Emotions and antagonism towards the police officers ran very high. There was a public outcry that said police officers be sent to the penitentiary. One of the police officers, namely Thomas Latinsky, was actually wounded by bullets when he emerged from a jewelry store with petitioner on the night that the "Police Scandal" cases broke. The then Prosecuting Attorney of Hancock County, West Virginia, Edward A. Zagula, arranged for petitioner to receive complete and total immunity in exchange for his testimony against the indicted police officers. The Honorable James G. McClure, Judge of the Circuit Court of Hancock County, granted the police officers separate trials and separate changes of venue thereby requiring numerous trials throughout various parts of the State. Petitioner was the key witness in each and every trial. These trials and petitioner's testimony received enormous and widespread publicity, especially in the newspapers, and particularly the *Weirton Daily Times*, the *Steubenville Herald Star* and the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, three newspapers of general circulation throughout Hancock County, West Virginia. Further, there were daily radio and television broadcasts reporting the various phases of the separate trials. The "Police Scandal" cases took nearly three years to complete. The last such trial

terminated during 1973 in the Circuit Court of Tucker County.

When petitioner was arrested, had a preliminary hearing, and was subsequently indicted during September, 1976, in the Circuit Court of Hancock County, he once again was the subject of newspaper articles reminding the public generally that he was the same man who had never been punished for his previous criminal activities.

Petitioner had requested of his counsel to file a petition for a change of venue before his first trial during April, 1976, but counsel mistakenly believed that a fair trial could be achieved in Hancock County. The jury deliberated less than fifteen (15) minutes before returning a verdict of guilty. When the Circuit Court of Hancock County granted petitioner a new trial and set aside his first conviction because of prosecutorial prejudicial errors committed during closing argument, he thereupon demanded that a change of venue be attempted for him. Counsel at this point readily agreed to make the attempt. A total of 36 witnesses were called by petitioner to impress the Honorable Floyd R. Tarr, Judge, that he could not receive a fair trial in Hancock County. The State called two witnesses, one of whom was a police officer of the City of Weirton, namely, Sergeant John William Curenton, and the other of whom was a Hancock County Magistrate, namely, Norman D. Ferrari, Jr. In addition to the testimony of witnesses petitioner offered several newspaper articles as exhibits in support of the petition for a change of venue. The evidence of the witnesses was overwhelmingly one-sided. These witnesses demonstrated through their sworn testimony that petitioner could not receive

a fair trial in Hancock County. He was characterized variously as a "con man", "drug pusher", "thief", "criminal" and "crook". Nevertheless, the trial court did not agree, denied the motion for a change of venue on September 1, 1977, and rescheduled the second trial to commence on September 7, 1977.

Petitioner, through counsel, had reminded the court that Hancock County was geographically the smallest County in the State of West Virginia and that its population was likewise one of the smallest. Counsel suggested to the court that there were few people indeed who did not remember petitioner's involvement with the "Police Scandal" cases and that there was general ill-will bordering on hatred against him. The trial court apparently felt that even though Hancock County has a population of only approximately forty five thousand (45,000) and even though the City of Weirton has approximately twenty seven thousand (27,000) that a fair and impartial jury could be empaneled.

A second trial resulted in a verdict of guilty in twenty minutes. Accordingly, two separate juries deliberated a total of thirty five minutes in arriving at their finding of guilt.

Thereafter, petitioner filed a petition for writ of error and supersedeas in the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia and the Court denied the petition on June 27, 1978.

REASON FOR GRANTING THE WRIT

I. A Defendant in a State Court Criminal Trial is denied rights afforded by the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments when the Trial Jurors are aware that the Defendant had been found guilty in a Prior Trial.

The Sixth Amendment to the Constitution of the

United States provides, in part, that in criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy trial, *by an impartial jury* of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed.

At the commencement of the second trial on September 7, 1977, the jurors were selected individually and on voir dire it was clear that some of the jurors were aware, by virtue of newspaper articles, that petitioner had been found guilty in the previous trial, as follows:

"Q Did those discussions influence you in any way?

"A No, 'cause just what was in the paper was mostly about a new trial and why, and it said he was convicted and that a new trial, and there must be some question or something if there is a new trial.

Q You are aware that Mr. Marra has had a previous trial?

A Yes.

Q And, you are aware he was found guilty and was granted a new trial?

A That was in the paper." (R. 92)

Other members of the panel had read of the prior trial and conviction and since the prospective jurors were not voir dired out of the presence of the other jurors the entire panel knew at the conclusion of the examination. A similar situation occurred in *U.S. v. Williams*, 568 F.2d 464 (5th Cir. 1978), where a local television news story reported that the defendant had been convicted earlier of the same charge but that the conviction had been set aside and a new trial awarded. On the third day of the second trial, it was pointed out

¹References made herein will be to the record as prepared and indexed by the circuit clerk of Hancock County of the trial transcript.

to the court that the television report included a statement that the four defendants had been convicted in a previous trial, but that a new trial had been granted.

The jury had been instructed not to read, view or listen to anything about the trial and when the court polled each juror individually after learning of the newscast, however, five jurors admitted knowing of the report, but only two had actually seen it. Both stated that the story would in no way influence their decision in the case.

Defense counsel moved for a mistrial, but the motion was denied and the court instructed the jury to disregard everything not heard in court. The court noted that there were two broad classes of publicity cases, pretrial publicity and publicity during trial and that when both occurred, the "overlap" result has been termed a "media circus" citing *Sheppard v. Maxwell*, 384 U.S. 333 (1966) and *Estes v. Texas*, 381 U.S. 532 (1965).

Although the court did not base its decision on constitutional principles but on this Court's decisions exercising supervisory powers over the federal courts the court acknowledged that such an occurrence was "inherently prejudicial."

The court noted that one of the fundamental rules of criminal law is that the government had the burden of establishing guilt solely on the basis of evidence produced in the courtroom under circumstances assuring the defendant the attendant judicial safeguards and turned to the question of the damage which results:

²*Murphy v. Florida*, 421 U.S. 794 (1945) and *Marshall v. U.S.*, 360 U.S. 310 (1959), held that persons who have learned from news sources of a defendant's prior criminal record are presumed to be prejudiced.

"The question, then, is whether information about a defendant's conviction in a former trial is as damaging as information about a defendant's prior criminal acts. *We conclude that it is perhaps even more damaging.* . . . In the instant case, the news story told the jurors that another jury had found the defendants guilty on the same, identical charges but that a new trial had been granted . . ." (Emphasis supplied).

As to the admonition given the jurors and the two jurors who stated they could disregard the newscast, the court responded:

"The fact that the two jurors said they could disregard the newscast and decide the case solely on the evidence adduced in the court is not controlling . . . The effect of exposure to extrajudicial reports on a juror's deliberations may be substantial even though it is not perceived by the juror himself, and a juror's good faith cannot counter this effect . . . We think that is the case here, i.e., that the juror's statements are insufficient to obviate the problems of fairness caused by the news report.

Nor are we convinced that the prejudice was corrected by the court's standard admonition to disregard everything not heard in court . . ."

The petitioner finds himself in the unenviable position that while this Court has not yet chosen to extend those rights he would receive in a federal prosecution to a state court proceeding, by virtue of the West Virginia appellate procedure he will be remediless.

II. The Decision Below Denied Petitioner an Appeal as a Matter of Right and Thus Denied Protection of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution.

No appeal as a matter of right exists in the State of West Virginia. Every state with the exception of West Virginia and Virginia provides for an appeal to either an intermediate appellate court or to the highest appellate court in the state as a right.

In West Virginia, statutory procedures require an application for appeal by means of an *ex parte* petition for a writ of error. The Supreme Court of Appeals, in its discretion, then determines whether there should be a full review of the case with presentation and arguments by both parties in the event the appeal is granted. A denial of the petition for writ of error is executed by entry of a brief order reciting such denial. Thus, no opinion, memorandum or other comment is available to an unsuccessful appellant-petitioner for possible future clarification in a petition for rehearing. A review of appellate procedures in other states reveals that those citizens, via state constitutions or statutory provisions, are entitled to a full appellate review upon briefs and arguments of counsel for both parties, as a matter of right.³

Chapter 58, Article 5, *et seq.*, West Virginia Code, 1931, as amended, are the applicable statutory sections dealing with appellate relief in the Supreme Court of Appeals of

³West Virginia and Virginia are the only two states which presently require applications for appellate review as opposed to an appeal as a matter of right. The State Codes and Constitutions of these two states are very similar due to the fact that West Virginia, upon entry to the Union in 1863, was formerly a part of the State of Virginia and adopted various constitutional provisions, statutes and procedures from the existing body of Virginia law. See also, Judicature, "Is the Right of Appeal Protected By the Fourteenth Amendment?," Vol. 54, No. 7, February, 1971.

West Virginia. West Virginia Code 58-5-1, 1931, as amended, in pertinent part, provides:

"A party to a controversy in any circuit court may obtain from the supreme court of appeals, or a judge thereof in vacation, an appeal from, or a writ of error or supersedeas to, a judgment, decree or order of such circuit court in the following cases: (a) In civil cases where the matter in controversy, exclusive of costs, is of greater value or amount than one hundred dollars, wherein there is a final judgment, decree or order;"

* * * *

There are no intermediate appellate courts in West Virginia and an application for appeal from a circuit court judgment must be taken according to the procedures set forth in West Virginia Code, 58-5 *et seq.*⁴

In addition, West Virginia Code, 58-5-3, provides:

"Any person who is a party to such controversy, wishing to obtain a writ of error, appeal or supersedeas in the cases named in the first section [§58-5-1] of this article, may present a petition therefor to the supreme court of appeals, or to a judge thereof in vacation, which petition shall assign errors.

West Virginia Code, 58-5-4, specifies that an application for appeal must be filed within eight months after the entry of the judgment order in the circuit court. This time limit is mandatory and jurisdictional and a failure to comply is fatal. *State v. Legg*, 151 W. Va. 401, 151 S. E. 2d 215 (1966).⁵

⁴Civil and Criminal appellate procedure is basically the same in West Virginia. An appeal of a conviction must also begin with an application for appeal by petition for a writ of error and supersedeas.

⁵This has been the general rule in West Virginia since 1885 when the West Virginia Supreme Court so held in the case of *Lloyd v. Kyle*, 26 W. Va. 534 (1885). See also, *Sothen v. Continental Assurance Co.*, 147 W. Va. 458, 128 S. E. 2d 458 (1962); *State ex rel Davis v. Boles*, 151 W. Va. 221, 151 S. E. 2d 110 (1966).

To a degree, West Virginia appellate relief can be compared with relief in this Court in that no appeal lies as a right. A case presented in this Court, either on appeal or certiorari, can be denied without opinion or further argument.⁶ It is apparent that such a procedure at the state level, where the first avenues of appellate relief should be clear and unrestricted, is manifestly unjust. The method presently in operation in West Virginia denies an aggrieved appellant the proper review and consideration contemplated by the dictates of fundamental fairness, due process and equal protection.

Although no statutory provision expressly states that there is no right to an appeal in West Virginia, the West Virginia Supreme Court of appeals has consistently held that the provisions of Chapter 58, Article 5, *et seq.*, do not provide an appeal as a matter of right even in criminal cases.⁷ In *State v. Legg*, 151 W. Va. 401, 151 S. E. 2d 215 (1966), a criminal appeal, the West Virginia Supreme Court of appeals held:

"One convicted of a criminal offense is not entitled to a writ of error as a matter of right. The Constitution and statutes create an absolute right merely to apply for a writ of error . . . There is no absolute right in a suitor to have a decision against him reviewed . . ."

It is apparent from the foregoing that an appellant in West Virginia is not afforded the same rights and

⁶Unlike West Virginia, however, there is a review as a matter of right to the Circuit Courts of Appeals in the federal system which provides an effective review. With variations, this is the appellate procedure adopted in all but two of the States.

⁷West Virginia Code, 58-5-10, 1931, as amended, provides: "The court or judge to whom a petition is duly presented, if of the opinion that the decision complained of ought to be reviewed, may allow an appeal . . ." Certainly implicit in this provision is the discretionary nature of the granting of an appeal; however, no provision in the Code expressly denies the right to appeal. The statutory procedure and cases interpreting that procedure speak for themselves.

privileges as appellants in other states. The petitioner herein was effectively denied a full appellate review without reason or explanation. There were valid assertions of constitutional as well as other errors at the trial court level raised by petitioner in his application for appeal below and such claims of error should not be cast aside summarily without full review and hearing.⁹

Petitioner has been denied his constitutionally protected right to due process of the law and has been denied equal protection of the laws. Petitioner is penalized for residing in one of the only two jurisdictions in the country which do not make the appellate review procedure available as a right. The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution can clearly be viewed as protecting the right to appeal for all citizens of the United States.

Appellate review and the right to be heard upon appeal without unreasoned restrictions have been the subject of many cases in this Court. *Rinaldi v. Yeager*, 384 U. S. 305 (1966), was a criminal appeal involving a prisoner's right to a transcript upon appeal. *Rinaldi* was proceeding in *forma pauperis* and could not afford the transcript required by New Jersey statutes. In reversing, this Court, per Justice Stewart, held:

"This Court has never held that the States are required to establish avenues of appellate review, but it is now fundamental that, once established, these avenues must be kept free of unreasoned

⁹Although Rules of Practice in the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia allow a maximum 10 minutes oral presentation of the application for appeal, for all practical purposes there is not sufficient time to argue the various legal issues raised upon the application and the merits of the case are rarely gone into at depth. The only meaningful treatment of legal questions is in appellant's brief.

distinctions that can only impede open and equal access to the Courts . . ." (Emphasis Supplied).⁹

Another case dealing with the furnishing of a transcript is *Mayer v. City of Chicago*, 404 U.S. 189, (1971), wherein, at page 193 of the United States Report, this Court readopted the rule in *Rinaldi* saying:

" . . . avenues of appellate review must be kept free of unreasoned distinctions that can only impede open and equal access to the courts . . . Therefore, in all cases the duty of the State is to provide the indigent as adequate and effective with funds . . ."

In West Virginia not only indigents but *every* aggrieved party seeking an appeal are shackled by the same unreasoned distinctions and restrictions.

The case of *Williams v. Oklahoma City*, 395 U. S. 458, (1969), similarly upheld the appellant's right to a transcript. The view as set forth in *Rinaldi v. Yeager*, 384 U. S. 305, *supra*, was followed and this Court also noted:

"Although the Oklahoma statutes expressly provide that 'an appeal to the Court of Criminal Appeals may be taken by the defendant as a matter of right . . . ' the decision of the Court of Criminal Appeals wholly denies any right of appeal to this impoverished petitioner . . . This is an 'unreasoned distinction' which the Fourteenth Amendment forbids the State to make . . ."

The instant case would perhaps be different if West Virginia was only one of many states which deny a

⁹There have been many "right to transcript" cases ruled upon both in this Court and in the various federal and state appellate courts. These cases are cited primarily to amplify the logic which underlies all decisions which afford appellate tools to ingredients and others, i.e., the sanctity of the appeal itself.

civil or criminal appeal as a matter of right. However, the language used by this Court in the foregoing cases indicates the gravity and importance of an unrestricted appellate process. Indeed, the Constitution intended to protect civil property rights as well as life and liberty. As noted in the Judicature article above¹⁰ the Model Judicial Article proposed by the American Bar Association recommends that a defendant shall have an absolute right to one appeal in all criminal cases. Without a doubt due process and equal protection guarantees protect civil litigants as well as criminal. See *Bodie v. Connecticut*, 401 U.S. 371, (1971).

Petitioners are thus asserting a right afforded the vast majority of citizens in this country. Whether a new and more approachable appellate system in West Virginia should result from this case is for this Court to decide upon the basis of its determination of the federally protected constitutional rights claimed herein. The system in West Virginia as it now stands violates fundamental fairness and equal protection in that the majority of appellants in this state possess rights without remedies.¹¹ Petitioners have no remedy at this time save the relief sought in this Court; had petitioners resided in any other state their appeal would have been properly heard long ago.

¹⁰See foot note 3, *ante*.

¹¹See 37 A.B.A. Rep. 391-399 (1962).

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons it is respectfully submitted that a writ of certiorari should issue to review the order of the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia.

Respectfully submitted,

LEO CATSONIS
CATSONIS AND LINKOUS
205 Security Building
Charleston, WV 25301

LEONARD Z. ALPERT
3167 Main Street
Weirton, WV 26062
Counsel for Petitioner

APPENDIX

A-1

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

At a Regular Term of the Supreme Court of Appeals continued and held at Charleston, Kanawha County, on the 26th day of June, 1978, the following order was made and entered, to-wit:

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

VS.

SAL MARRA

On a former day, to-wit, May 22, 1978, came the petitioner, Sal Marra, by Leonard Z. Alpert, his attorney, and presented to the Court his petition praying for a writ of error and supersedeas to a judgment of the Circuit Court of Hancock County rendered in this case on the 26th day of September, 1977, with the record therein accompanying the petition, and note of argument in support thereof, which being seen and inspected the writ of error and supersedeas prayed for is refused by a majority of the Court. Justice Miller would grant.

A True Copy

Attest:

Clerk Supreme Court of Appeals

West Virginia Code, Ch. 58, Art. 5, sec. 1

§58-5-1. When appeal or writ or error lies.

A party to a controversy in any circuit court may obtain from the supreme court of appeals, or a judge thereof in vacation, an appeal from, or a writ of error or supersedeas to, a judgment, decree or order of such circuit court in the following cases: (a) In civil cases where the matter in controversy, exclusive of costs, is of greater value or

amount than one hundred dollars, wherein there is a final judgment, decree or order;

(b) In controversies concerning the title or boundaries of land, the probate of a will, or the appointment of a personal representative, guardian, committee or curator;

(c) Concerning a mill, road, way, ferry or landing;

(d) Concerning the right of a corporation, county or district to levy tolls or taxes;

(e) In any case of quo warranto, habeas corpus, mandamus or prohibition;

(f) In any case involving freedom or the constitutionality of a law;

(g) In any case in chancery wherein there is a decree or order dissolving or refusing to dissolve an injunction, or requiring money to be paid, or real estate to be sold, or the possession or title of property to be changed, or adjudicating the principles of the cause;

(h) In any case where there is a judgment or order quashing or abating, or refusing to quash or abate, an attachment;

(i) In any civil case where there is an order granting a new trial or rehearing, and in such cases an appeal may be taken from the order without waiting for the new trial or rehearing to be had;

(j) In any criminal case where there has been a conviction in a circuit court or a conviction in an inferior court which has been affirmed in a circuit court.

Appeals shall not lie under subdivisions (g), (h) and (i) where pecuniary interests only are involved, unless

the amount in controversy, exclusive of costs, exceeds one hundred dollars.

West Virginia Code, Ch. 58, Art. 5, sec. 3

§58-5-3 Presentation of petition assigning errors.

Any person who is a party to such controversy, wishing to obtain a writ of error, appeal or supersedeas in the cases named in the first section [§ 58-5-1] of this article, may present a petition therefor to the supreme court of appeals, or to a judge thereof in vacation, which petition shall assign errors.

West Virginia Code, Ch. 58, Art. 5, sec. 4

§58-5-4. Time for appeal or writ of error; notice of intent to file petition in criminal cases to be filed with clerk stating grounds.

No petition shall be presented for an appeal from, or writ of error or supersedeas to, any judgment, decree or order, whether the State be a party thereto or not, which shall have been rendered or made more than eight months before such petition is presented.

In criminal cases no petition for appeal or writ of error shall be presented unless a notice of intent to file such petition shall have been filed with the clerk of the court in which the judgment or order was entered within sixty days after such judgment or order was entered. The notice shall fairly state the grounds for the petition without restricting the right to assign additional grounds in the petition. (Code 1849, c. 182, § 3;)

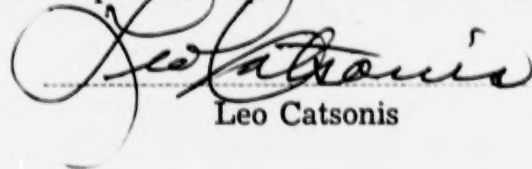
West Virginia Code, Ch. 58, Art. 5, sec. 10

§58-5-10. Allowance of appeal or writ of error or supersedeas; stay of proceedings.

The court or judge to whom a petition is duly presented, if of opinion that the decision complained of ought to be reviewed, may allow an appeal, writ of error or supersedeas, and may stay proceedings either in whole or in part.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Leo Catsonis, one of counsel for the petitioner and a member of the Bar of the Supreme Court of the United States hereby certify that, on the ~~2nd~~ day of September, 1978, I served three (3) copies of the foregoing Petition for Writ of Certiorari on the respondent by depositing same in a United States mailbox, with postage prepaid, addressed to counsel of record for the respondents, Robert G. Altomare, Prosecuting Attorney, Hancock County Court House, New Cumberland, West Virginia 26047. I further certify that all parties required to be served have been served.


Leo Catsonis

NOV 29 1978

MICHAEL D. DAK, JR., CLERK

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No. 78-504

SAL MARRA,

Petitioner

v.

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

Respondent

**RESPONSE TO PETITION
FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI**

ROBERT G. ALTOMARE
PROSECUTING ATTORNEY FOR
HANCOCK COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA
3401 Pennsylvania Avenue
Weirton, West Virginia 26062

COUNSEL FOR RESPONDENT

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Respondent

**RESPONSE TO PETITION FOR WRIT OF
CERTIORARI**

Respondent, The State of West Virginia, respectfully prays that a writ of certiorari be denied the petitioner who has heretofore filed a petition to review the judgement of the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia entered on June 27th, 1978.

OPINION BELOW

The Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia denied the petitioner's petition for writ of error and supersedeas by Order entered June 27th, 1978, and therefore this matter is without opinion from the Court below.

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Did the Circuit Court of Hancock County, West Virginia, abridge the petitioner's Sixth and Fourteenth Amendment rights by denying the petitioner's motion for change of venue?
2. Is a defendant in West Virginia denied equal protection of the law for reason that an appeal does not lie as a matter of right in a criminal prosecution?

**CONSTITUTIONAL AND STATUTORY
PROVISIONS INVOLVED**

Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments; W.Va. Code, Ch. 58, Art. 5, Section 1,3,4,and 10.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

As indicated in the petitioner's petition for writ of certiorari, the petitioner was indicted at the September, 1976 term of the Circuit Court of Hancock County, West Virginia, for sale and delivery of two (2) pounds of marijuana, a felony. Petitioner was tried and convicted by jury verdict in June, 1977. Petitioner's motion for a new trial on grounds of alleged error was granted by the Circuit Court and petitioner was retried and convicted by jury verdict in September, 1977. Between petitioner's first and second trial, petitioner filed a motion for change of venue alleging existence of a general hostile attitude against him among the citizens of Hancock County.

After having heard the testimony of numerous witnesses called by the petitioner, and as well the cross-examination of said witnesses by the State of West Virginia, the Circuit Court of Hancock County, after deliberation and comment, denied the petitioner's motion.

The testimony surrounding petitioner's motion for change of venue generally was that the petitioner had a bad reputation in Weirton, West Virginia, (the largest city in Hancock County) for failure to meet his financial obligations timely. Most witnesses called by the petitioner stated that petitioner enjoyed a reputation for an unwillingness to meet his financial obligations when the same became due. A number of witnesses recalled that the petitioner had been granted immunity from prosecution in return for his testimony against members of the Weirton Police Department who, along with the petitioner, perpetrated the crime of breaking and entering a jewelry store in Hancock County, West Virginia, in 1971. A Weirton police officer and petitioner were apprehended at the scene of the breaking and entering and were arrested. The Weirton police officer ultimately pleaded guilty to the crime of breaking and entering and was sentenced to confinement in the West Virginia Penitentiary for not less than one (1) year nor more than ten (10) years.

The petitioner turned State's evidence against three (3) other police officers allegedly involved as accessories before the fact and ultimately two (2) of the the three (3) police officers were acquitted by jury trial and one (1) convicted. Nevertheless, the petitioner contended that his testimony and grant of immunity by the Courts resulted in a hostile attitude toward him by the citizens of Hancock County.

Although the jury in both of petitioner's cases deliberated for short periods of time, the State's evidence against the petitioner in the trial Court below was overwhelming. Three (3) adult witnesses who allegedly purchased the marijuana from the petitioner testified in great detail as to the time, place and manner of the sale. In addition, entrapment was never raised or made an issue in the trial court and the only issue to be resolved by the jury was the credibility of witnesses. As an addendum and not legal argument, it is interesting to note that the petitioner testified during his first trial and decided against testifying at his second

trial.

REASON FOR DENYING THE WRIT

I. The granting of the petitioner's motion for change of venue is within the sound discretion of the trial court.

Although the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States provides a right to speedy trial by an impartial jury, the issue of an impartial jury is in the sound discretion of the trial Court.

Under West Virginia law the burden is upon the prisoner to show good cause for the change of venue. *State v. Beale*, 104 W.Va., 617, 141 S.E. 7 (1927). An application for change of venue in a criminal case is addressed to the sound discretion of the trial judge and the facts in support of a motion for change of venue must exist at the time the application is made. *State v. Wilson*, 202, S.E. 2d, 828 (1974).

The Supreme Court of the State of West Virginia was held in *State v. Riley*, 151 W.Va. 364, 151 S.E. 2d, 309 (1966) and *State v. Dandy*, 151 W.Va. 547, 153 S.E. 2d 507 (1967) that a general hostility throughout the County must exist against the defendant at the time of his application for change of venue which would deny the defendant a fair trial. When the veniemen were questioned by the trial court immediately preceding the commencement of the trial, all twenty (20), prior to striking, admitted under oath that they were unaware of any personal bias for or against the defendant and that they were unaware of any of the defendant's prior actions, either criminal or civil. After questioning by both counsel for the State of West Virginia and the petitioner, the Court was satisfied that the twenty (20) jurors were qualified to serve at the petitioner's trial.

The record below is abundantly clear that the twelve (12) petit jurors at both the petitioner's first and second trial were free of

any bias or prejudice for or against the petitioner and convicted the petitioner solely on the facts presented at the petitioner's trial.

II. Was the petitioner denied equal protection of the law because the State of West Virginia does not provide an accused with an appeal as a matter of right?

West Virginia appellate procedure in criminal cases requires ex parte petition for a writ of error. Thereafter, the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia, in its discretion, determines whether to grant or deny the application. If application is denied, the matter is concluded by entry of order reciting the denial.

Although the petitioner cites several cases in his petition dealing with the right of appeal, none of the same have squarely held that to deny a defendant an automatic right of appeal deprives him of equal protection of the law. Although the respondent agrees that indigent defendants should be provided with counsel, transcripts and other aids to facilitate an appeal, it is submitted that it is not unconstitutional for a State not to provide a defendant with an automatic right of appeal to the highest court within the borders of that particular State. In West Virginia, the only appellate court beyond a circuit court is the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals. There are no intermediate courts and therefore a jury verdict in a Circuit Court is appealable only to the Supreme Court.

It is submitted that if a defendant is provided access to the Supreme Court by petition for writ of error, which he is in West Virginia, and the Supreme Court refuses ex parte the petitioner's written petition and the law in support thereof, which the Court does, that the petitioner has not been deprived of any constitutional safeguards. Actually, the petitioner enjoys a much better position in West Virginia in that his petition is heard ex parte by the Court before granting or denial and therefore the Court is in a position to review and study those cases and statutes and conclusions most favorable to the petitioner's position as cited by his counsel. It is submitted that if the Court then feels that the

prayer of the petition should be denied, it has in fact afforded the petitioner an opportunity to persuade the court to hear the matter in full argument.

It is submitted that in the interest of time and justice, the appellate procedure in criminal cases followed by the State of West Virginia is more favorable to the appellant than the procedures followed in States which require appearance, arguments and briefs by both the State or commonwealth and the defendant.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, it is respectfully submitted that the petition for writ of certiorari should be denied.

Respectfully Submitted,
ROBERT G. ALTOMARE
PROSECUTING ATTORNEY FOR
HANCOCK COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA
 3401 Pennsylvania Avenue
 Weirton, West Virginia 26062

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Robert G. Altomare, Prosecuting Attorney for Hancock County, West Virginia, as counsel for the respondent, hereby certify that, on the day of November, 1978, I served three (3) copies of the foregoing Response to Petition for Writ of Certiorari upon the petitioner by depositing same in a United States mailbox, with postage prepaid, addressed to counsel of record for the petitioner, Leo Catsonis, Catsonis and Linkous, 205 Security Building, Charleston, West Virginia 25301; and Leonard Z. Alpert, 3167 Main Street, Weirton, West Virginia, 26062. I further certify that all parties required to be served have been served.

**ROBERT G. ALTOMARE
PROSECUTING ATTORNEY FOR
HANCOCK COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA**